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The Captive Gypsy.
Constance Davies-Woodrow.

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The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS

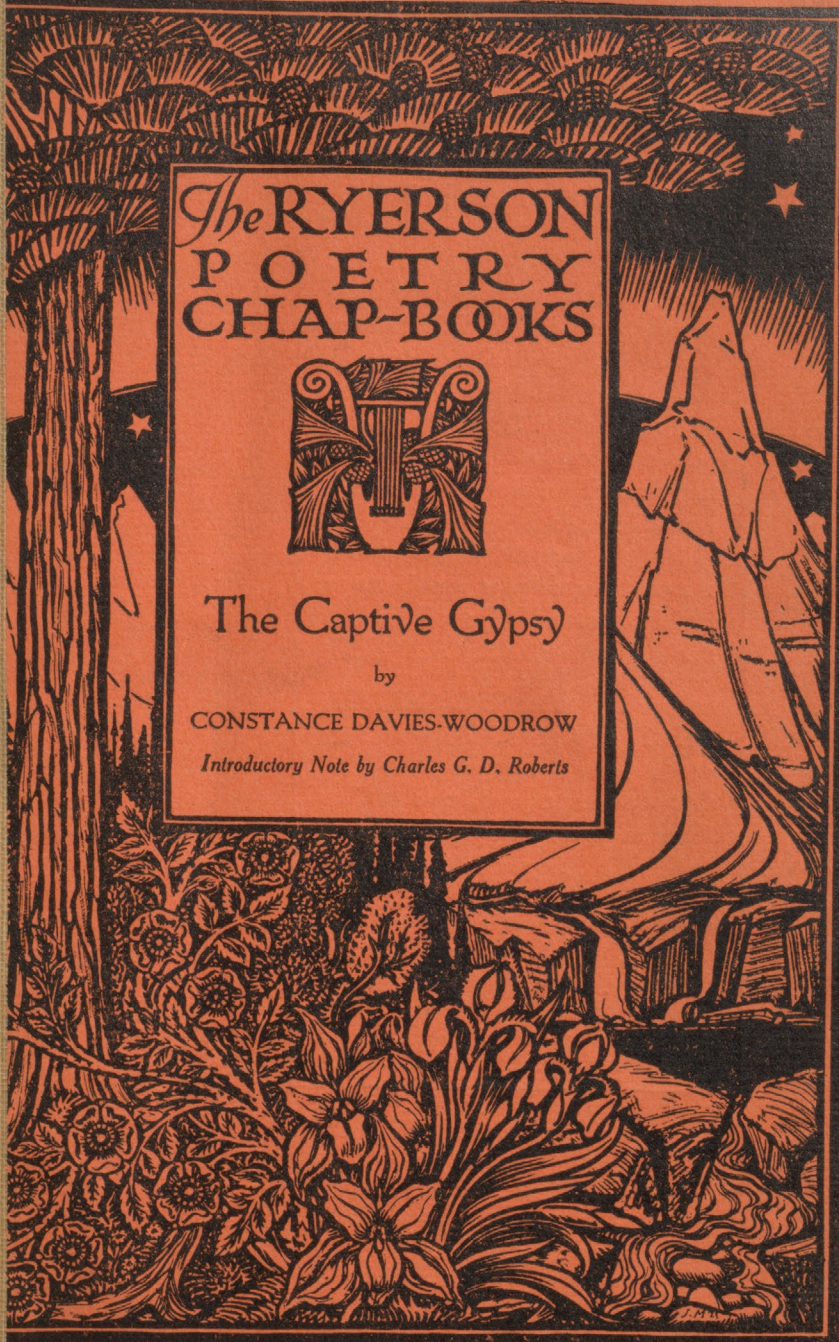


The Captive Gypsy

by

CONSTANCE DAVIES-WOODROW

Introductory Note by Charles G. D. Roberts



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS are made to the following, in whose pages most of these poems first appeared: *The Hamilton Herald*, *The Canadian Bookman*, *The Canadian Magazine*, *The Christian Guardian*, *National Life of Canada*, *The Woman's Magazine*, London, England; to Dr. Lorne Pierce for permission to include the memorial poem to Marjorie Pickthall, which appears in his *Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance*; also to M. Robert Choquette for permission to include the translation of his poem, "La Vie Sort de la Mort."

Of this edition of THE CAPTIVE GIPSY two hundred and fifty copies have been printed. This Chap-book is a production of The Ryerson Press, Toronto, Canada.

Copies of this Chap-book may be secured from The Ryerson Press, Toronto, and from Macrae Smith Company, Philadelphia, U.S.A.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

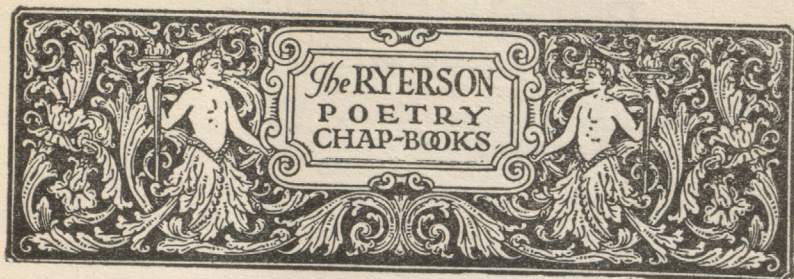
IT IS a pleasure to associate myself with this modest collection of poems by Constance Davies-Woodrow. Among the qualities to be looked for in all poetry those of sincerity, simplicity and candour always make a particular appeal to me. Equally essential, according to my own artistic faith, are music in phrase and cadence, the quest of beauty in both thought and form, and conscientious workmanship. These qualities seem to me to characterize, in no small measure, the poems here gathered; and they make the little book a refreshing protest against the defiance of sound technique, the mistaking of violence for strength and of ugliness for originality, which mark so much of our contemporary verse.

Authentic emotions, expressed with such brave directness, yet with a grace so persuasive, should carry these brief lyrics into the hearts of many readers.

"Ernescliffe," Toronto,
Easter, 1926.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

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The Captive Gypsy

By Constance Davies-Woodrow



THE CAPTIVE GYPSY

THE LITTLE clouds, unshepherded,
Drift idly thro' the sky;
The zephyrs wander where they will;
The birds unhindered fly.
And oh, that I were free as they,
A gypsy for another day!

A little road runs past my door,
Then up the hill and down,
Across a little wooden bridge,
And onward to the town:
I follow it in fancies sweet
Since love has bound my gypsy feet.

'Tis when the Spring is in the air,
When flowers begin to bloom,
When mating birds are carolling
From out the woodland gloom,
My heart grows sick for winding ways,
For gypsy joys of other days.

Three

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HERITAGE

BETWEEN two agèd ghosts I walk
From morning until night;
My father's sire is on my left,
My mother's on my right.
The one, a roving Irishman,
Went sailing all his days;
The other was an Englishman
Who clung to quiet ways.

And why they never let me rest
I cannot understand.
While one is whispering in my ear
The other pulls my hand.
One fills my head with strange, wild thoughts
Till all my heart's on fire;
The other whispers: *Dearest child,*
Heed not thy father's sire!

Between two agèd ghosts I walk
From morning until night;
My father's sire is on my left,
My mother's on my right.
The voice of one cries: *Go, colleen!*
The other bids me stay.
Forsooth, I cannot please them both.
Oh, which shall I obey?



THE YOUNG WIFE

HE SLEEPS, and I, still wakeful, am alone.
His spirit wanders far
In some enchanted star,
Forgetting me, so short a while his own.

Thro' waking hours I nestle in his heart;
His thoughts about me throng
In laughter, dream and song
Until he sleeps; then am I thrust apart.

Oh, lonely, dreary, wakeful hours of night!
I cannot reach his hand
In sleep's enchanted land;
He roams with shadow-folk beyond my sight.

Be still, my heart! What foolish thought is this?
Pales even now the moon;
The dawn will wake him soon;
And then remembrance and the day's first kiss!



THE LITTLE HOUSE

SO SMALL a house it is!
But o'er its threshold not a care may creep,
For round it love has raised
A magic wall no evil may o'erleap.

So glad a house it is!
Its smile of welcome at the long day's end
Can banish weariness
Like handclasp, warm and close, of well-loved friend.

So full of peace it is!—
A place for quiet dreaming, spirit-rest
And sweet, refreshing sleep:
Here faith and hope and love have made their nest.



I THINK GOD LOVES A GARDEN

I THINK God loves a garden,
Its fragrance and its song;
That still He walks at twilight
The drowsy flowers among.

I think God sometimes wearies
Of incense and of praise,
Then seeks earth's garden songsters
And blossom-scented ways.

When stir my garden-grasses
Beneath a starlit sky,
I fancy 'tis the garments
Of God, Who passes by.

POSSESSION

I HAVE no garden of my own—
No blaze of flowers, no cool green shade of tree,—
But kindly robber-breezes blow
My neighbor's garden-fragrances to me.

And thro' my kitchen window-pane
I see his flowers unfolding to the dawn,
The growing beauty of his tree,
The loveliness of dew-drops on his lawn.

I have no garden of my own;
I may not sit beneath my neighbor's tree;
But wherefore should I envy him?
In scent and beauty I am rich as he.



GREY SEAS ARE SOBBING

GREY seas are sobbing wildly at my feet;
Above my head grey clouds are drifting by;
Dim fields lie bare, for garnered is the wheat;
A gull is echoing my heart's lone cry.

The summer days have all too swiftly flown;
The fairest flowers too soon are withering;
The yellow leaves in little heaps are blown;
The song-birds, southward-bound, are on the wing.

My world to-day is grey as seas and skies;
The cheek you kissed, with foolish tears is wet,
For, as you turned, the shadow in your eyes
Betrayed you felt and shared my vain regret.

In fancy, at the closing of the day,
I still shall seek my place upon your breast,
Touch tenderly the hair just turning grey,
Then fall asleep—ah, foolish me!—caressed.

FORGET YOU?

FORGET you?—Belovèd, how can I?
The scent of a dew-laved flower,
The song of a bird in the twilight,
Recalls every perfect hour.

Forget you?—Or waking or sleeping,
I wander on pathways we knew,
Till my heart, overshadowed and songless,
Half-breaks with the thought of you.

Forget you?—My spirit is calling
Your name all the long day through,
Till at night in my dreams I am lying
In tears on the heart of you.



TO A VAGABOND

BUT HALF of me is woman grown;
The other half is child.
But half my heart loves quiet ways;
The other half is wild.
And so to hear your gypsy song
I dare not come again;
To-morrow, when the twilight falls,
Your voice will lure in vain.

For all of you is vagabond
And all of you is free;
Your feet roam still the winding trails
That now are strange to me.
My gypsy feet are captive held
Within a garden-space
Since I renounced the whole wide world
For one belovèd face.

TO MARJORIE PICKTHALL

THE LAUREL CROWN had barely touched your brow,
Its freshly-gathered leaves scarce shed their dew,
When "one clear call" you heard; and somewhere now
The Master Singer waits to welcome you.

The trees you loved are bursting into leaf;
The sweet wild flowers are stirring 'mid the grass;
Will you not hear—Ah, this were cause for grief!—
The feet of Spring that near you softly pass?

God grant that where you go there will be flowers,
The shade of trees, and sun on grasses green,
Wind-rippled waters, even clouds and showers,
For these on earth so dear to you have been!



SLUMBER SONG

COME, my little one, close thine eyes!
The cloud-lambs hasten across the skies,
Seeking their fold,
For the day grows old.
Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye-lo!

Each little bird is now at rest;
The flowers are nodding on Mother Earth's breast
And sleepily sigh
As the wind goes by.
Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye-lo!

The dream-ship rocks on the blue dream-sea,
And hark, the dream-babes call to thee!
Sleep, little son,
Ere the ship sail on!
Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye-lo!

To the Land of Magic far away,
Where the fairies dwell and the dream-babes play,
The dream-ship goes
When the night-wind blows.
Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye-lo!

WHEN I COME HOME

I SHALL forget the dreary days of waiting,
The long, lone nights of fitful sleep and prayer,
The doubts and questionings, the endless yearning
For just your dear rough hands upon my hair,
When I come home.

The meadows will be stripped of all their flowers,
The wind-swept harvest-fields of all their grain;
The woodland will be emptied of its song-birds;
Dead leaves will drift in heaps along the lane,
When I come home.

But oh, what joy to see our own loved cottage,
Our garden with its maple-trees aflame,
And—best of all for which my heart is yearning—
To hear once more upon your lips my name,
When I come home!



TO THE UNBORN

O LITTLE soul unborn, that I no more
Might hear thy piteous cries, thy lonely tears
Borne to me here from some mysterious shore,
Filling my heart with sadness thro' the years!

My heart knows well, O little soul unborn,
That thou art weary of thy cold, strange nest,
Of angels' light, cool kisses in the morn:
Thy being craves a warm earth-mother's breast.

Only in dreams I touch thy baby-cheeks;
About my hands thy tiny fingers creep;
I feel thy little groping head that seeks
A snug, warm place upon my breast for sleep!

Oh, thou art frightened of the lone green ways,
The far, strange, silent meadows blossom-strewn,
The sound of falling rain, the sunset-blaze,
The eerie shadows and the cold white moon!

For thou art all alone, alone, my sweet!
No mother's voice may softly croon to thee;
Never to her may run thy tiny feet—
O little soul unborn, it may not be!



THE ANGEL MOTHER

IN ANGEL SONG she took no part,
Of ceaseless praises weary grown;
She roamed celestial paths alone,
That she might hide her earth-sick heart.

Her harp she hung upon a tree;
Stray breezes swept across its strings
And waked old dreams of far-off things:
Her eyes looked earthward wistfully.

She saw the babes of earth who crept,
Play-wearied, to a mother's breast;
The harp crooned softly, wind-caressed;
As only angels can, she wept.

A babe drew nigh the glory throne,
Forlornly scanned each angel's face. . . .
Not there his wee head's resting-place,
The mother's breast he once had known!

He came where still the angel wept. . . .
At last the long-missed mother-ways!
For her the end of songless days,
As close against her heart he crept.

VIGIL

POOR, foolish dog! How long you look in vain!
To-day or any day
He will not come, he will not come again
Who is so far away.
What seems his step is but the drift of leaves,
The dreary drip of rain-drops from the eaves.

Be still awhile! Your little lonely whine
Brings back an olden pain,
Stirs dust of dreams in this lone heart of mine,
Wakes olden griefs again,
Till all my soul cries out, uncomforted,
Unheeded, unremembered by our dead.



THE CICADA

(From the Greek of Anacreon.)

NOW WE hail thee, O Cicada,
When upon the topmost tree,
Having drunk thy fill of dew,
Like a king thou singest free.

Thine, Cicada, all things are
That thou seest in every field,
And to thee is everything
That the leafy woods do yield.

Thou of mortals art adored,
Prophet sweet of summer heat;
Thee the Muses love—e'en Phoebus
Gave thy voice its piercing sweet.

Crabbèd age doth never waste thee,
Earth-born, filled with love of song:
Wise, but passionless, not mortal,
Thou shouldst to the gods belong.

THE ROAD TO MAKE-BELIEVE

OH, THE wonderful road to *Make-Believe*
Winds into the heart of the hills of dream,
Thro' the rainbow's arch to the cloudland vales,
And away to the last pale starry gleam.

Oh, the wonderful road to *Make-Believe*
'Tis only the feet of the young may find—
The young in heart—for the hearts grown old
Have forgotten the way and are left behind.

So long as you still can find the way—
Tho' Time may have silvered the brown or gold,
Tho' wrinkles and furrows be many and deep—
Oh, you need not grieve, you are not yet old!



SONNET

(From the French of Félix Arvers.)

MY SOUL its secret has, its mystery:
A love eternal in a moment grown.
I have kept silence as I ought, and she
Who caused my hopeless pain has never known.

I shall have passed beside her unperceived—
Alas!—forever near her, yet alone,
Until my years of life on earth are done,
Naught having asked and having naught received.

Though God has made her sweet and tender, she
Will go her way all undiscerningly,
Nor hear this murmured love so close at hand.

For she, devoutly true to duty's task,
Reading these lines so full of her, will ask:
"Who is this woman?"—and will not understand.

THE GYPSY SPELL

YOU HAVE woven a spell, O Gypsy Man—
O cruel and heartless rover!—
To take my heart in your caravan,
A-roaming the wide world over.

You have snared my heart with your gypsy song,
Soft sung thro' the summer gloaming,
Till now, alas! it must aye belong
To you and your gypsy roaming.

By the wild, sweet ways that wind and wind,
O'er meadow and hill and hollow,
You roam—ah, me!—too far to find,
If ever my feet could follow.



NOVEMBER IN ENGLAND

NOVEMBER!—and my homesick heart is sighing
For England's autumn skies, though chill and grey,
Her booming seas, her grey gulls' mournful crying.
November, and my feet so far away!

No more across her meadows birds are calling;
Dead leaves along her country-lanes are blown;
In fancy I can hear the raindrops falling
From branch to branch in woodlands I have known.

I see the city-throngs when day is ending
Upon their homeward way pass to and fro;
A grey mist swiftly, silently descending,
And then but phantom-faces row on row.

Oh, joy, to fall asleep and find on waking
Some well-remembered, crowded English street!
For England how my homesick heart is aching,
E'en for her very rain-pools 'neath my feet!

THE NUN

SHE STOOD alone within the holy place;
The sunset-glory thro' the window streamed
And touched with tenderness the Virgin's face:
The pale nun gazed, forgot her prayers and dreamed.

* * * * *

The Holy Mother o'er a cradle bent
To lay therein a little sleeping Child,
In Whom divine and human strangely blent,
Around Whose cradle hosts of angels smiled.

But Mary saw her own loved baby-boy;
What mattered it that He was strangely born?
Like other babes He cried, or cooed his joy,
And wakened hungry at her kiss each morn.

* * * * *

The pale nun knelt before the Virgin's shrine,
As memory's door against her will swung wide,
And mingled scents of musk and eglantine
Came drifting thro' from some far eventide.

"O Thou to Whom my woman's soul is bare,
In pity strip my heart of dreams this night,
And grant me peace!"—Upon the nun's grey hair
There fell caressingly the sunset-light.

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A SPINSTER

HER WITHERED cheeks are flushed with faintest rose,
As if the last shy blush still lingered there;
The dreams of youth still haunt her wistful eyes;
The gold of youth has not yet left her hair.
But Love, who missed her beauty, passed her by
And has not found her since. I wonder why?

For she was surely made for Love's delight;
Her gentle hands were fashioned to caress;
Her soft, warm breast for Love's own head was made,
Her voice to charm away Love's weariness.
Had Love but paused to seek one only kiss,
Then had he stayed, for he had learned all this.

OUT OF DEATH COMETH FORTH LIFE

(From the French of Robert Choquette.)

WHY SIGH o'er dying leaves, and o'er the thing
Which in its arrogance thy foot did press?
Hast thou ne'er thought, when blossoms gathering,
That in their frailty lies their loveliness?

Not all things to the deeps of night descend.
Not life, but form and color vanish there.
And thou, O heart of yearnings without end,
Thou findest hope in midst of thy despair.

Death ne'er destroys; it changes everything.
The dust of birds becomes the forest-floor;
The worm the bird has preyed upon, takes wing,
Upsoaring to the skies it craved before.

Escaping from the fingers of the skies,
The falling snow conceals each miry blot.
From every tomb a thousand flowerets rise.
By Winter, hoary-haired, is Spring begot.

Through too much grief the broken heart finds death,
But love survives the heart where love was born.
The stars are quenched by dying night's last breath;
The newborn sun is cradled by the morn.

Together, dust of man and dust of thing
In death are mingled in the hidden womb,
And, after strange and holy travail, spring
In sheaves of ripened corn from earthen gloom.

'Tis little deaths that make up Life, forsooth.
The crone that sleeps, by weight of years oppressed,
The old tree felled, give earth more radiant youth.
On Death the feet of Life eternal, rest.

MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN

THERE is a land called *Might-Have-Been*
My heart roams wistfully,
Where many a street and country-lane
Winds hillward from the sea.

And hillward from the shining sea
Climb houses row on row—
Some large and new, some small and quaint,
That love built long ago.

But thro' the dusty window-panes
No face is ever seen:
What other land so lone and still
As that of *Might-Have-Been*?

There is a murmuring at night
From room to empty room;
'Tis not the wind, but lovers' ghosts
That wander thro' the gloom.

'Tis that wee house that crowns the hill—
Just big enough for three—
That lures me back to *Might-Have-Been*,
For, ah, 'twas built for me!



IN OTHER ARMS THAN ENGLAND'S

OH, BROKEN are the slumbers
Of England's own who lie
In other arms than England's,
Beneath a far-off sky!

The babes that England cradles
Are hers for evermore,
Though later years may find them
Upon some far-off shore.

Who die afar from England—
How can they sleep or rest
Beyond the arms of England,
The old grey mother's breast?

They hear the rhythmic rippling
Of England's brooks and streams;
The soft, grey rains of England
Are falling through their dreams.

The scent of England's hawthorn
In memory still they keep;
The fragrance of her roses
Goes drifting through their sleep.

God rest the troubled spirits
Of England's own who lie
In other arms than England's,
Beneath a far-off sky!



THE MAGDALEN

SILENT I stood, my head bowed low in shame.
Belovèd, I had died for love of thee,
But He called Jesus to my rescue came,
Staying the hand of Scribe and Pharisee.

Cried He: *Let him be first to cast a stone
Who hath not sinned.* And one by one, dismayed,
They stole away, until I stood alone
Beside the Christ, and I was sore afraid.

And hath no man condemned thee? Tenderly
He spake, and ceased His writing on the floor.
Nay, Lord, I said. (What would His judgment be?)
Nor then do I. *Go thou and sin no more.*

The shadow of the Rabbi parts us now:
No more thy kisses stir me as of old;
They rain unfelt on hair and eyes and brow
And on my lips grown passionless and cold.

Belovèd, go! No more am I thine own.
Thy way and mine henceforth must lie apart.
Though yesterday I lived for thee alone,
To-day thou art an exile from my heart.



DEFEAT

BETWEEN the grey monotony of sky
And darker grey monotony of sea
A solitary seagull passes by,
Beating the air, and screaming plaintively.

And even so—between grey yesterdays,
Before your coming waked my dreaming heart,
And darker grey to-morrows, when our ways
Must lie forever half a world apart—

I take my way on wings that feebly beat
Against the adverse winds of circumstance,
My heart, rebellious at this last defeat,
Screaming defiance at the Gods of Chance.



LOVE COMES THIS WAY

WITH scent of many an opening rose
Across the grassy, sunlit hills
It drifts on every breeze that blows;
Its music all the woodland fills—
The message sweet: *Love comes this way!*
And sweeter still: *Love comes to stay!*

Along the sands the sea sings low;
A murmur rises from the grass;
The tell-tale breeze goes to and fro;
From flower to flower soft whispers pass.
Say one and all: *Love comes this way!*
Oh, tidings sweet!—*Love comes to stay!*

FREEDOM

MY SOUL is kin of winged, wild things
That cannot stay with folded wings
The parent-nest beside;
That while but fledglings immature
Do feel the overpowering lure
To spaces lone and wide.

Shut in behind convention's bars
I cannot breathe; sun, moon and stars
Are ever calling me
To leave its close-confining bounds,
Its petty wranglings' jarring sounds,
And wander lone and free.

I needs must choose the paths that stray
Far from the beaten tracks away,
Where there is ample space
For heart and mind and soul to grow,
Where rarer, purer airs do blow,
Where love finds breathing-place.



BEREFT

SING to me, little one! (Let me not hear
The desolate dripping of rain thro' the trees,
The moaning of wind like a spirit in fear!)
Sing to me, little one, here at my knees!

Sing to me softly! (Out in the gloom
Withered leaves drift from the maple-trees blown;
Seeks now his spirit the asters in bloom?)
Tears? 'Tis your fancy! Sing on, mother's own!

Sing me a lullaby! (Strange, he is dead!
Dead! . . . Yet the small hands I hold he caressed;
Just so he looked, even so turned his head . . .
Memory incarnate has lain at my breast!)

THE LONE HOUSE

THE LITTLE house is sleeping,
A myriad memories keeping
Behind its long-locked door.
With grief the stars are paling,
The mournful winds go wailing
That you return no more.

The roses' day is over,
But drifting scent of clover
The dreaming garden fills.
The moon climbs, palely golden,
As in those twilights olden,
Above the darkling hills.

A whip-poor-will is calling,
My lonely heart enthralling
As in the long ago.
I leave the lone house sleeping,
My secret in its keeping
That you will never know.

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Lorne Pierce—Editor

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